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SUBJECT: COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMAL MEETING

Summary

1. The Commission on Human Rights met September 27 in Geneva to review the work of the OHCHR Secretariat since the close of the 61st CHR session, and to preview resolutions that governments plan to introduce during the Third Committee in New York. Most of the planned resolutions hew closely to those introduced in previous years. Perhaps due to the admonition from CHR Chair Makarim Wibisono that the Geneva CHR meeting was not the venue in which to raise controversial subjects, no delegation spoke in any detail about the new Human Rights Council. Belarus took the floor to attack the "human rights situation in the United States," and plans to introduce a resolution this year criticizing both the U.S. and the EU. End Summary.

Statement of High Commissioner for Human Rights

2. The opening statement by High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour focused on the recent gathering of heads of state in New York and the Plan of Action of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Mrs. Arbour hailed the "notable advances" made in New York on human rights questions and the continued relevance of human rights issues as one of the pillars of the UN system. She noted the challenge of translating the consensus about creating a Human Rights Council into practice and pledged the assistance of OHCHR to work together with governments to accomplish the task. Mrs. Arbour further thanked CHR member countries for their support for OHCHR's Plan of Action, and particularly for the agreement to double the OHCHR's budget over the next five years. She said that she would like to see OHCHR's expertise in thematic human rights issues consolidated and reinforced, and planned to strengthen her office's women's rights expertise. OHCHR has set up thirteen in-house task forces, with each tasked to make detailed recommendations for implementing a specific aspect of the Plan of Action. The Plan of Action and its implementation will be the focus of Mrs. Arbour's report to the General Assembly.

Preview of Planned Third Committee Resolutions

3. After updates from Secretariat staff on human rights agenda items of the Third Committee, several governments and NGOs made general statements before previewing the resolutions they plan to introduce in New York. Notable among them was the insistence of Amnesty International that NGOs be allowed to participate in the General Assembly negotiations on the new Human Rights Council. The Association for the Prevention of Torture commented that the fight against terrorism doesn't excuse torture by "a number of governments," including violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law, the "outsourcing of torture" and using "dubious diplomatic explanations" to defend this practice. The Danish delegation will table the relevant resolution during Third Committee.

4. Mexico will introduce a resolution on migrants with only minor revisions to last year's text, and will also table a draft resolution on disabled persons. Mexico will also sponsor a resolution on combatting terrorism which will argue that "the fight against terrorism doesn't justify the permanent suppression of human rights."

5. The UK, speaking in its capacity as EU president, stated that under item 69, the EU would table its traditional omnibus resolution on the Rights of the Child, with a particular focus this year on the rights of children living with HIV and AIDS. Under item 71, the UK Deputy PermRep stressed the EU's commitment to combat racism and racial discrimination, as well as to the Durban Declaration and Program of Work. The statement stressed the importance the EU attaches to consensus in the international follow-up to Durban, and regret that "the consensus conclusions of the Inter-Governmental Working Group on Durban Follow-Up were not respected in the Committee on Human Rights." This statement later brought a heated rebuke from the Ethiopian Ambassador in his capacity as chair of the Africa Group. The EU will also table a resolution on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance, which will be run by the Netherlands

on behalf of the EU.

16. Russia will introduce a resolution on racial bias, xenophobia and related problems, with similar text to last year's resolution. The Russian delegate expressed the hope that the draft can be adopted without a vote. Finland will introduce its traditional UNHCR resolution, modelled on last year's. Chile plans to introduce a draft resolution on the right to reparations by victims of human rights violations. Belarus noted that at the 59th CHR it had put forward a resolution on the situation of human rights in the U.S. Belarus had not pushed the resolution during the 60th CHR, but "the signal by Belarus was not welcomed by the U.S. and the human rights situation in the U.S. has not improved." Belarus commented further on violations of the rights of national minorities and migrants in certain countries of the EU, and said it would table a resolution critical of the U.S. and EU. Sweden will introduce the Nordic resolution on the international human rights covenants. Denmark will introduce the resolution on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment referenced earlier by the Association for the Prevention of Torture. Norway plans three resolutions: one on CEDAW under item 66, another under item 73b on protection for IDPs, and a third on human rights defenders. Finally, Austria plans resolutions on human rights and the administration of justice, as well as on ethnic and linguistic minorities.

17. The next formal meeting of the Commission on Human Rights is scheduled for January 16, 2006.

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